



Country report Palestine

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Acronyms

2G	second generation mobile network or service
3G	third generation mobile network or service
4G	fourth generation mobile network or service
5G	fifth generation mobile network or service
ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
ALE	adult learning and education
DVV International	Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
GIZ	The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
ICT	information and communication technologies
km ²	square kilometre
LCD	liquid crystal display
Mbps	megabits per second
MENA region	Middle East and North Africa region
ms	millisecond
MS Teams	Microsoft Teams
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
SDG	sustainable development goal
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference of Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAT	value added tax

VET

vocational education and training

1 Introduction

This country report represents an output of the *Analysis of Digitalisation in ALE in Asia: Risks and Challenges for Reaching out to Marginalised Groups* assignment carried out by the expert team of IMACON - ERUDIO for DVV International. The purpose of the study is to explore the current situation and the role digital formats can play in adult learning and education (ALE) in Asia, specifically in Cambodia, Tajikistan and Palestine. The following country report focuses on the digital landscape, needs, demands and trends in Palestine.

The country report is divided into nine chapters. Following the introductory section describing the methodology, the subsequent chapter provides a concise overview of the general socio-economic context in Palestine as well as of its education system. The fourth section presents an introduction and the specific context of adult learning and education in Palestine. The following chapter summarises key information and data available in relation to digitalisation including its possibilities, limitations and challenges. The next chapter focuses on stakeholders' expectations and views and presents the qualitative findings of the study. The final three sections include recommendations drawn from the findings, relevant annexes and literature sources used.

2 Methodology

For the purpose of this country report, the expert team understands **digitalisation** as an opportunity to affect **education** and learning of pupils, students as well as adults in a positive way which directly or indirectly improves their **socio-economic situation** as a result. These above-mentioned pillars form the baseline for the quantitative as well as qualitative analysis and are explored in detail in the subsequent chapters. The following methods of data collection were used:

- **desk research** – the author examined an extensive list of national and international documents (studies, research papers, reports and statistics) that include information and data about socio-economic, education and digital situation in Palestine. In addition to that, a number of Palestine's strategic materials was studied as well as thematic publications related to the implementation of sustainable development goals. The full list of resources can be found in chapter 9.
- **field research** – to supplement the secondary data gathered through the desk research, the author conducted two focus group discussions – one with ALE providers (5 participants), one with ALE beneficiaries (8 participants) and four semi-structured interviews (5 participants) with a variety of stakeholders representing different target group levels including policy-making representatives. The interview and focus group discussions' details are listed in annex 1. The topics and issues explored (as defined in the Inception report) are presented in annex 2.
- **synthesis** – all information and data collected through the desk and field research were synthesised. This forms the baseline for recommendations for promoting digital ALE addressing the needs of the learners in Palestine.

Throughout the study preparation, the author communicated with the DVV International's Country Director for Palestine who has been instrumental in providing research and strategic materials that had not been publicly available. She has also been invaluable in identifying relevant respondents for focus group discussions and individual interviews and in arranging these sessions.

3 Context

3.1 General socio-economic context

The establishment of Palestinian self-government arrangements in 1994 did not bring about a significant economic change enabling further development. The vision of a relatively open movement of goods and labour between Israel and Palestine (as defined in the *Protocol on Economic Relations Between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization*) did not materialise and it has adversely affected the Palestinian economy. Further aggravated by the border closures during 1996 and 1997, it had a negative impact on the country's employment, household income and an incidence of poverty. As a result, the Palestinian dependency on the Israeli economy has increased.¹ Although an opening of a safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was permitted in late 1999 fuelling a moderate economic recovery, the building of a separation barrier in the West Bank in the early 2000s had a further negative impact on Palestinian economic activity (for instance, by restricting access of Palestinians to construction, agriculture and blue-collar jobs in Israel).

The restriction of the movement of Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories is one of the issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The restrictions consist of physical obstacles (checkpoints, barriers, gates) as well as administrative limitations (permit requirements). After Hamas took power in 2007, Israel prohibited (with rare exceptions) entry and exit in the Gaza Strip, a policy still in effect today. These restrictions on movement not only cause a life of uncertainty but also 'bear implications for the Palestinian economy and its development potential'.² Several of the World Bank reports consider this a major factor impeding economic stability and potential growth in the region citing reasons such as delayed arrival of goods or non-arrival of raw materials.³

According to the UNCTAD's report published in 2019, the share of manufacturing in the economy shrunk from 20% to 11% of the gross domestic product (GDP).⁴ According to the report, the expansion and severity of occupation, deterioration of the security situation and a bleak political outlook are the reasons behind the near collapse of the Palestinian economy. While the European Union provides substantial financial assistance to Palestine (between 1994 and 2011, approximately €5 billion in development aid was sent by the EU), it has not resulted in significant improvements in the Palestinian economy. Widespread corruption, inefficient administration and restrictions affecting trade are cited as the key reasons.⁵

During 2017 - 2019, annual GDP growth averaged 1.3% which was lower than the population growth rate, resulting in decreasing per capita incomes and increasing poverty.⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges and 2020 proved to be an exceptionally problematic year for Palestine – in addition to the COVID-19 outbreak, it was marked by a severe economic slowdown and another political standoff with Israel.⁷ However, the subsequent waves of the pandemic in 2021 have been even more challenging and the overall economic outlook has remained precarious with numerous political, security and health risks.⁸

¹ United Nations. 1998. *The Palestinian Economy and Prospects for Regional Cooperation*.

² [n.a.]. 2017. *Restrictions on Movement*.

³ The World Bank. 2017. *Prospects for Growth and Jobs in the Palestinian Economy a General Equilibrium Analysis*.

⁴ UNCTAD. 2019. *Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory*.

⁵ Sydow, Ch. 2012. *Activists Seek Ban on Trade with Israeli Settlers*.

⁶ The World Bank. 2021. *Palestinian Territories*.

⁷ The World Bank. 2020. *Palestinian Territories' Economic Update — October 2020*.

⁸ The World Bank. 2021. *Palestinian Territories' Economic Update — April 2021*.

The persisting fragile context is the focus of a new four-year assistance strategy for the Palestinian territories developed by the World Bank Group. The strategy strives to support resilience of livelihoods and focus on transformational investment for ‘a well-connected’⁹ Palestinian economy with long-term economic returns. Aligned with the new Palestinian Authority’s *National Development Plan (2021 - 2023)*, it aims to enhance public trust in institutions, resilience and employment opportunities.¹⁰

Demographics and marginalised groups in Palestine

Based on the United Nations Statistics Division data, in 2020 the population of Palestine was 5,101,000 (approximately 60% of which lived in the West Bank and the remaining 40%¹¹ in the Gaza Strip)¹² resulting in the population density of 847.4 capita per km². The above-average birth rate has kept the annual growth rate very high (2.4% in 2020) and despite consistent negative net migration (-10,563 in 2020), the population continues to rise as the average woman in Palestine gives birth to around four children (3.7 fertility rate in 2020).¹³

In 2017, nearly 99% of Palestinians were Muslims, with Christians making up less than 1% of the population. There are more than 600,000 Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. In 2017, the urban population in Palestine was 77%, the rural population was 15% while the percentage living in the camps was 8%.¹⁴

About half of all Palestinians are political **refugees** with the largest group being created after the proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing war. The past few years have also witnessed several waves of violence, escalations and military operations which had a detrimental effect on personal freedoms and rights of the Palestinians and an increased number of refugees and displaced persons.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the percentage of the population of refugees in Palestine at the end of 2018 reached about 41% of the total Palestinian population. Data showed that 26% of the population in the West Bank and 64% of the population in the Gaza Strip were refugees.¹⁵

Data also indicated that there is a clear difference among refugees and non-refugees in relation to the level of unemployment – in 2018, the unemployment rate among refugees reached nearly 40% compared to 24% among non-refugees. This had a direct impact on the poverty percentage which was 15.7% in the West Bank and 54.1% among refugees in the Gaza Strip in the same year.¹⁶ A recent report published by the United Nations argues that the negative poverty rate development in the Gaza Strip between 2007 – 2017 is a direct result of the Israeli blockade and military hostilities in the Strip.¹⁷

The Palestinian community is characterised by being a young society as the percentage of individuals under the age of 15 reached 37.9% (35.8% in the West Bank, 41% in the Gaza

⁹ Creating ‘a well-connected Palestine’ is one of the aims of the World Bank’s Assistance Strategy – by reducing ‘connectivity gaps’ ensuing both from restrictions that are *outside* the Palestinian control (e.g. restrictions on movement and access, infrastructure, trade policy, mobile spectrum) as well as from weak connections between the areas that are *within* the Palestinian control (e.g. disconnects between policies and reform agenda, the isolation of the Gaza and the West Bank).

¹⁰ The World Bank Group. 2021. *Assistance Strategy for the West Bank and Gaza for the Period of 2022 - 2025*.

¹¹ PCBS. 2021. *Population*.

¹² Compare the surface area: The West Bank – 5,640 km², The Gaza Strip – 365 km².

¹³ The United Nations Statistics Division. 2020. *State of Palestine: General Information*.

¹⁴ [n.a.]. 2020. *Population of Palestine*.

¹⁵ PCBS. 2019. *The International Day of Refugees 2019*.

¹⁶ PCBS. 2019. *The International Day of Refugees 2019*.

¹⁷ United Nations. 2020. *Economic costs of the Israeli occupation for the Palestinian people: the Gaza Strip under closure and restrictions*.

Strip), the percentage of youth (15 - 29 years) reached 28.4% while the percentage of elderly people (60+ years) was only 5.4%.¹⁸ Although **youth** comprise nearly one third of the Palestinian society, they are largely absent from the decision-making processes and community development. This situation is accompanied by youth exposure to high levels of violence, negative behaviours and unemployment rate as high as 39%.¹⁹

Like many territories in conflict, Palestine struggles to secure the civil rights of its people. Women's rights are a particularly critical issue in Palestine with **women** forming one of the country's most vulnerable groups. Several organisations point out the fact that women and girls face discrimination in law and practice and are inadequately protected against gender-based violence.²⁰ They face a difficult reality in terms of political participation and access to decision-making and although Palestinian feminist and human rights movements have reached several important achievements²¹, gender disparities remain significant.²² Violence against women including domestic abuse is of particular concern in Palestine. Although women have advocated for protective laws for a number of years, there is no comprehensive domestic violence law in place.²³

According to the data of the *Population, Housing and Establishment Census* from 2017, **persons with disabilities** constitute 2.1% of the total population while the mobility disability accounted for about 50% of the total persons with disabilities.²⁴ Much of the disability in Palestine is linked to the ongoing conflict which prevents Palestinians from accessing services including prenatal and postnatal care and also results in large numbers of persons being seriously injured. It is estimated that as much as 10% of these injuries lead to life-long disabilities.²⁵

A specific marginalised group in Palestine is formed by officially **unrecognised communities** that for decades have faced evictions and profound social exclusion. Its residents encounter record levels of home demolitions and displacement. Some data indicate that in the period from 2009 to May 2019, 1,424 homes were demolished rendering 6,269 people homeless and displaced.²⁶ Residents of these communities often live under the poverty line and in numerous cases they are forced to destroy their own homes to avoid costly demolition fees.

3.2 Education system in Palestine

As outlined in the previous section, the continuing crisis in Palestine is characterised by Israeli occupation, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, and the recurrent escalations of violence. In such circumstances, access to education remains compromised as hostilities include attacks on schools, threats against school staff and students not to mention the damaged education infrastructure.

In Gaza, the system struggles with its capacity to deliver education to the growing number of students. Based on the data by PCBS, there were 574,849 students in 2019/2020 and with 751 schools, classrooms had an average of 39.3 students.²⁷ As many schools were destroyed during the hostilities, 61.7% of government schools in Gaza operate on a double

¹⁸ PCBS. 2021. *Population*.

¹⁹ UNFPA. 2016. *Status of Vulnerable and Marginalized Youth groups in Palestine*.

²⁰ Amnesty International. 2020. *Palestine (State of) 2020*.

²¹ For example, the amendment of the Palestinian Elections Law securing a 20% quota representation in local councils and the Legislative Council.

²² Shahwan, N. M. 2020. *The ongoing struggle of Palestinian women*.

²³ Stephens, K. 2020. *Women's rights in Palestine*.

²⁴ PCBS. 2019. *The International Day of Persons with Disabilities*.

²⁵ Abuasi, N. 2021. *Disability in Palestine is intertwined with poverty*.

²⁶ Minority Rights Group International. 2019. *Palestine*.

²⁷ PCBS. 2020. *Selected Indicators for Education in Palestine by Level of Education and Region*.

shift system.²⁸ However, this resulted in reducing hours in core subjects which did not sufficiently solve the issue of crowded classrooms.

Although the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is less acute (with an average number of students per class 26.3)²⁹, the classroom shortage is evident – UNICEF states 2,557 classrooms shortage in East Jerusalem.³⁰ It is expected to worsen as the school age population is expected to increase in the coming years due to demographic changes.

The Palestinian education system consists of pre-school education, compulsory basic education (grades 1 to 4 - preparatory stage, grades 5 to 10 - empowerment stage), secondary education (general, technical and vocational), higher education and non-formal education. The country's net enrolment rates are high – 49% in pre-primary education, 94% in primary education and 88.3% in secondary education in 2019. Considering the economic hardship, gross enrolment rate in tertiary education is very high – 43.2%, significantly higher for women (53.9%) than for men (32.9%).³¹

The management of the education system in Palestine is fragmented. Public schools, colleges and universities are managed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education; in the past, these two institutions have been repeatedly merged and separated again. In 2017, 5.25% of GDP was allocated to financing the education sector.³² The system is; however, heavily reliant on foreign aid which has been reduced in the recent years.

The importance of education is recognised in the *National Policy Agenda 2017 – 2022* which clearly declares the need to 'shift the focus to quality and relevance' (relevance meaning alignment of education and labour market needs) while this is not viewed as an exclusive state responsibility. The policy agenda also highlights the need to modernise curricula and integrate digitalisation.³³

The key sectoral strategy for education is the *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022* which also stresses the importance of quality education through developing student-centred teaching and learning pedagogy and environment (strategic goal 2). The critical need to develop the teaching profession and enhance teacher education programmes transpired already in 2008 when the *National Teacher Education Strategy* was developed revealing that estimated 80% of teachers are not qualified.³⁴

The current education strategy clearly states the key challenges of individual education levels with recurring issues such as:

- inadequate infrastructure – concerning not only school shortage in general but also equipment, human resources and accommodating children/ students with disabilities;
- unsatisfactory quality of teaching – concerning the poor quality of teacher training, digital illiteracy, negligence of curriculum and a lack of education relevant to the labour market needs;
- poor sector management and governance – isolated information systems, centralisation, unclear ministry responsibilities, weak monitoring mechanisms and the reliance of the development budget on foreign aid.³⁵

While the strategy explicitly identifies the deficiencies across the whole education sector and provides suggestions for overcoming them, its implementation has not been subject to a publicly available review.

²⁸ UNESCO. 2017. *Country Plan: Palestine*.

²⁹ PCBS. 2020. *Selected Indicators for Education in Palestine by Level of Education and Region*.

³⁰ UNICEF. 2020. *Education Cluster Strategy*.

³¹ UNESCO. 2019. *Palestine: Participation in Education*.

³² UNESCO. 2019. *Palestine: Participation in Education*.

³³ State of Palestine. 2016. *National Policy Agenda 2017 – 2022*.

³⁴ Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2008. *Teacher Education Strategy in Palestine*.

³⁵ Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2017. *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022*.

All of the strategic materials mentioned above have adopted the *2030 Agenda* sustainable development goals (SDGs) despite the substantial challenges Palestine faces in their implementation, specifically Israeli occupation, population growth that constantly increases demand on basic services, insufficient resources and a lack of available data for monitoring the SDGs. To demonstrate its commitment to SDG 4 ('ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'), the *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022* and its aspirations reflect its targets.

Palestine was part of the 2018 voluntary national review on the implementation of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* which acknowledged Palestine's progress in several areas, for instance in an increase in net enrolment rates and literacy rates, a decline in drop-out rates and in addressing the gender gap in education. However, despite these successful efforts, safe and quality education remains threatened. Schools continue to suffer from dilapidated infrastructure and a poor learning environment leaving students with disabilities left behind.³⁶

³⁶ State of Palestine. 2018. *Palestinian National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda*.

4 Adult learning and education

4.1 Introduction

Education in its broadest sense can be viewed as a powerful tool for shaping people's attitudes and opinions and can even influence the way they treat each other and how they react to diversity. It should not be perceived merely within the boundaries of formal education or education of children and young students only. On the contrary, it should span across our lives including all their facets - professional and private. Based on this understanding, adult education should not be regarded as supplementary but rather as a lifelong development of individuals in whatever form – formal, non-formal and informal. The shift in this perception is reflected in the UNESCO terminology from *adult education* (UNESCO 1976 recommendations³⁷) to *adult learning and education* (UNESCO 2015 recommendations³⁸). It accepts the argument that learning activities are not always structured and intentional.

The only constant in today's fast-paced society, or indeed life, is change and education and lifelong learning enable people to understand it, cope with it and respond to it. Given the current global situation full of violent acts, radicalisation or a worldwide pandemic, the need for competencies such as critical thinking, cooperation, communication and resilience is becoming even more important. They lead to a socially inclusive approach to diversity and therefore, potentially reducing the chances of radicalisation and extremism.

It should be noted that 'education cannot prevent an individual from committing a violent act in the name of a violent extremist ideology but the provision of relevant education of good quality can help create the conditions that make it difficult for violent extremist ideologies and acts to proliferate.'³⁹ The role of education in its wide sense is to create conditions that strengthen people's commitment to non-violence, democracy, inclusion and sustainability.

Given the immense potential of education (understood as lifelong learning), it is not unexpected that it makes a crucial contribution towards achieving the SDGs and the *2030 Agenda* as a whole. Lifelong learning as a sustainable development goal has been included for the first time, specifically in the Goal on Education (SDG 4). For instance, target 4.6. explicitly refers to adult learners while for the implementation of target 4.7., which calls for skills for sustainable development, non-formal programmes are essential.

Figure 1: The 2030 Agenda: SDG 4

³⁷ UNESCO. 1976. *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*.

³⁸ UNESCO. 2015. *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*.

³⁹ UNESCO. 2017. *Preventing violent extremism through education. A guide for policy-makers*.

The Education Goal of Agenda 2030 - SDG 4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- 4.1. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- 4.2. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.
- 4.3. By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.
- 4.4. By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- 4.5. By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
- 4.6. By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
- 4.7. By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human

Source: United Nations. 2015.

Targeting adult literacy and numeracy (target 4.6.) is the first step in creating opportunities for people to remove themselves from poverty as they are essential for acquiring further skills and/ or enter the labour market. It is not an aim in itself – the most successful ALE programmes have combined literacy with other learning activities (e.g. vocational skills) as the expertise of DVV International confirms.⁴⁰

According to UNESCO, education has the potential to equip people with values, attitudes and behaviours that are prerequisite and support responsible global citizenship such as commitment to peace, human rights and sustainable development – the very same values that are at the heart of the *2030 Agenda*.

4.2 Adult learning and education in Palestine

The inception of ALE in Palestine dates back to the 5th International Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg in 1997. Palestine incorporated the conference's thematic areas into the *Education for All National Plan* through specific goals:

- goal 3 – meeting the needs of education for all adults through equitable benefit from appropriate education programmes and acquiring the required life skills;
- goal 4 – improvement of 50% in adult literacy levels by 2015, especially for women, and achieving equitable access to basic and continuing education opportunities for all adults.⁴¹

⁴⁰ DVV International. 2019. *Youth and Adult Education in the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals*.

⁴¹ State of Palestine. 2014. *Education for All 2015 National Review*.

Priorities in ALE included especially reduction of illiteracy and school drop-outs, providing skills and vocational training to workers and alignment of education with the labour market needs. Key challenges of non-formal education are also captured in the *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022* with limited financial resources, a lack of cooperation, monitoring and supervision being the most critical ones.⁴²

The key strategic document is the *National Strategy for Adult Education 2014 – 2019* that has been developed participatively with representatives of various ministries, universities, colleges as well as institutions operating within the ALE area. The Ministry of Education understands and addresses ALE from two perspectives:

- by providing programmes in informal education and continuing education (e.g. illiteracy programmes, VET);
- by establishing partnerships with international organisations to provide and develop infrastructure (schools, curricula etc.).⁴³

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has tried to increase the enrolment in **vocational education and training** (VET) as well as reduce barriers between VET and general education by developing vocational units and a technology track in general education.⁴⁴ The institutions providing VET vary – from vocational schools and technical colleges (formal education and training) to vocational training centres and private centres (non-formal education and training) represented by governmental sectors (the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Development), civil society and international players. Based on the national report published by the ETF, the number of institutions providing VET has increased from 225 in 2017/2018 to 266 in 2018/2019. At the same time, the number of enrolled students has increased by 30% (from 14,840 in 2017/2018 to 19,359 in 2018/2019).⁴⁵

There does not exist a common understanding of the ALE concept in Palestine and the multiple viewpoints are evident in the variety of terminology that is being used – adult education, non-formal basic learning, civic, citizenship and human rights education, community development and community participation, cultural learning and empowerment, education for resilience.⁴⁶ The ambiguity of the term does not present itself only through research work or strategic documents but as a study by Al-Kilani points out, it is evident among its key stakeholders. In his *Adult Education in Palestine: The Situation, the Requirements and Prospects of Improvement* published in 2019, he refers to the confusion surrounding the concept of ALE which transpired at focus group discussions and individual interviews with representatives of various institutions from this field. According to them, ALE is often narrowly understood within the concept of **literacy** or vocational or technical training only. On the other hand, representatives from civil society organisations showed a broader perception of the concept extending it to the **community education** to improve the situation of individuals and the society.⁴⁷

A recent DVV International's study⁴⁸ shows how literacy centres may be transformed into **community development centres** by widening their services to include programmes focusing on life skills and personal and professional development that can ultimately lead to enhanced perspectives of local communities. On the example of the first three community-based centres for youth and adult education DVV International illustrates how partnership

⁴² Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2017. *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022*.

⁴³ Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2014. *The National Strategy for Adult Education (In the Context of Lifelong Learning) 2014 - 2019*.

⁴⁴ ETF. 2020. *Palestine: Education, Training and Employment Developments 2020*.

⁴⁵ ETF. 2020. *Torino Process 2018 – 2020 Palestine*.

⁴⁶ DVV International. 2021. *Public Financing of Popular Adult Learning and Education (ALE)*.

⁴⁷ Al-Kilani, S. 2019. *Adult Education in Palestine: The Situation, the Requirements and Prospects of Improvement*.

⁴⁸ DVV International. 2021. *Public Financing of Popular Adult Learning and Education (ALE)*.

facilitation and liaison can motivate local businesses and municipalities to provide support – either financial or non-financial, for instance by proactively promoting centres’ activities.

The individual bodies overseeing ALE in Palestine are manifold. While the Ministry of Education oversees the literacy and ALE programmes, parallel education programmes and continuous education programmes in universities and colleges, there are two other ministries responsible for non-formal education, namely the Ministry of Labour (overseeing vocational and technical training) and the Ministry of Social Development (overseeing social and rehabilitation services for girls and boys). Private sector enters this area through cultural centres and continuing education programmes delivered in private and community-based universities and colleges. Similarly, international organisations play an important role by running rehabilitation and training centres.⁴⁹

A recent study by Al-Kilani provides a clearer picture on the main ALE actors and their key target groups which is summarised in the table below:

Table 1: An overview of key ALE actors in Palestine

Key ALE actors	Key provision	Key target groups
The Ministry of Education	Literacy programmes	Illiterate population aged 14 and above
	Parallel education programmes – to gain qualification that enables to enter a vocational education course	School drop-outs aged 13 – 40
	Evening education programmes – to enable to apply for the General Certificate of Education ⁵⁰	Population aged 18 – 40
The Ministry of Labour	Vocational and technical training, specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • industrial vocational training programmes • vocational training programmes for the trade and service sectors • supplementary courses in the transportation sector 	Job seekers Workers seeking professional development
The Ministry of Social Development	Social, academic and vocational rehabilitation services	Girls and boys aged 13 – 18 Persons with disabilities
Universities through continuing education centres	A variety of programmes ranging from short qualifying courses to programmes leading to a specialised diploma	University graduates
Private sector institutions through cultural centres/ educational centres	Mainly language courses Auxiliary courses for school students	Young job seekers University graduates
The Department of Community Education	Technical training programmes Programmes focused on empowerment, participation, citizenship and human rights	Adults seeking personal development

⁴⁹ Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2017. *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022*.

⁵⁰ The General Certificate of Education, known as *Tawjihi*, is required to enrol at higher education institutions after 12 years of schooling (10 years of basic education, 2 years of secondary education).

UNRWA	Vocational and technical education courses Semi-professional technical and qualifying courses Shorter courses to improve technical skills	Refugee youth
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Source: Al-Kilani, S. 2019.

The lack of clarity of the ALE concept can be perceived in the legislative and financial vagueness, too – non-formal education is not included in the Palestinian Education Law (Presidential Decree) 8/2017 and no public funds are allocated to ALE except for literacy education programmes.⁵¹ The existence of many ALE activities depends to a high degree on external funding. For instance, the support for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) between the years 2016 – 2019 reached more than €30 million, most of which was provided by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ). Other international donors and partners include International Labour Organization (ILO), Belgian Development Agency (Enabel), Joint Financing Arrangement (Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway), UNESCO, USAID and UNRWA.⁵² DVV International has been active in all levels concerning ALE from supporting the National Committee on Adult Education and implementation of the *National Strategy for Adult Education* (strategic level) to the development of various training programmes for ALE providers as well as educational activities for the empowerment of disadvantaged target groups (provider and beneficiary level).⁵³

Among the most often cited difficulties ALE in Palestine faces are weak coordination among stakeholders (among various ministries and between the government and other sectors), insufficient strategic, legislative and financing mechanisms in place, absence of a national accreditation framework, absence of clear criteria and standards and limited accessibility of ALE. Moreover, with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 new challenges have emerged which highlighted some of the weaknesses already acknowledged in the *National Strategy for Adult Education* such as a lack of long-term plans to utilise information technology in the educational process, a shortage of qualified personnel with adequate IT skills or unfamiliarity of learners with distant learning and self-learning.⁵⁴ These aspects are further elaborated in the following sections of the report.

⁵¹ DVV International. 2021. *Public Financing of Popular Adult Learning and Education (ALE)*.

⁵² ETF. 2020. *Torino Process 2018 – 2020 Palestine*.

⁵³ DVV International. 2020. *Annual Report 2019*.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2014. *The National Strategy for Adult Education (In the Context of Lifelong Learning) 2014 - 2019*.

5 Digitalisation in Palestine

5.1 General context

Technology is often seen as a means to a world without borders enabling not only communication but also labour opportunities, digital market and collaboration of experts of all sectors including education, health care or research and development. The access to information and digital products seems particularly significant for Palestine that suffers from various types of borders (checkpoints, roadblocks) and movement restrictions. The way how information and communication technologies (ICT) became a tool for survival and life continuity under conflict by its ability to connect societies through access to the Internet has already been explored.⁵⁵ Similarly, digital transformation has been claimed not only boost innovation and productivity across economic sectors but also improve wellbeing.⁵⁶

As for the **digital infrastructure** in Palestine, it must be noted that although the *Oslo Agreements* in 1995 granted Palestinians ‘the right to build and operate separate and independent communication systems and infrastructures including telecommunication networks, a television network and a radio network,’⁵⁷ no independent ICT infrastructure has been allowed to develop. As a result, it is difficult to identify and source digitalisation data in its entirety due to the demographic, geographical and jurisdictional fragmentation over the Palestinian territories – the West Bank is controlled by the Palestinian Authority, the Gaza Strip is under the administration of Hamas while the rest is under the Israeli control. In terms of telecommunications companies and Internet service providers, the Palestinians living in the West Bank are serviced by both Palestinian and Israeli companies, the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip use the services of the Palestinian service providers.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, publicly available data show that in 2020, the number of **Internet users** in Palestine reached 3.25 million which represents the penetration of 64%.⁵⁹ This is an increase of 2% compared to 2017.⁶⁰ For comparison, in 2017 the average Internet penetration in the MENA region countries reached 57% which increased relatively sharply to 65% the following year.⁶¹

Based on the statistics by PCBS, in 2019, 33.2% of Palestinian households had a desktop computer, a laptop or a tablet (35.7% in the West Bank, 28.7% in the Gaza Strip). Interestingly, there is virtually no variance between the type of locality – 33.6% for an urban, 33.7% for a rural locality. A slightly lower percentage was identified within camps (27.6%). The most significant difference between the Palestinian regions can be observed within the desktop computer indicator – 10.4% of households in the West Bank had a desktop computer while only 3.9% in the Gaza Strip had one.⁶²

In 2020, there were 4.33 million **mobile phone connections** (86.6%)⁶³ representing an increase of 8.6% from 2017.⁶⁴ In 2016, the two main mobile companies operating in Palestine were Jawwal (used by 74% of Palestinians) and Wataniya (used by 15% of

⁵⁵ Saidam, S. 2007. *Knowledge and e-governance building in conflict affected societies: Challenges and mechanisms*.

⁵⁶ OECD. 2017. *Going Digital: Making the Transformation Work for Growth and Well-Being*.

⁵⁷ The Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. 1995. *The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement*.

⁵⁸ Tamleh. 2018. *Internet Freedoms in Palestine: Mapping of Digital Rights Violations and Threats*.

⁵⁹ DataReportal. 2020. *Digital 2020: Palestine*.

⁶⁰ DataReportal. 2017. *Digital 2017: Palestine*.

⁶¹ The World Bank. [n.d.]. *Individuals using the Internet (% of population) – Middle East and North Africa*.

⁶² PCBS. 2021. *Palestine in Figures*.

⁶³ DataReportal. 2020. *Digital 2020: Palestine*.

⁶⁴ DataReportal. 2017. *Digital 2017: Palestine*.

Palestinians); the remaining 11% used Israeli companies.⁶⁵ However, Palestinian mobile operators are put at a disadvantage by the unauthorised activity and spread of Israeli operators in the West Bank. Additionally, Israel controls importing ICT equipment and technologies into and within the Palestinian territories.

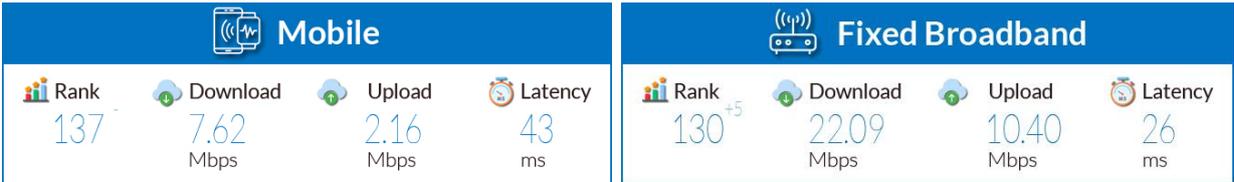
Although the **third generation (3G) feature** was available in the world markets in the early 2000s, the West Bank was among the last places in the MENA region to launch it in 2018 with the Gaza Strip still using the second generation (2G). As the world moves to 4G/ 5G, the current broadband infrastructure in Palestine is outdated and not sufficient to cover the needs and aspirations of its population. The access to 4G/ 5G spectrum as well as the telecommunications market are being controlled by Israeli operators. Its negative economic and social consequences were the reason for the Palestinian Authority to publish a letter to the international and donor community in Palestine about the negative impact of such deprivation.⁶⁶ It must also be noted that Israeli operators have 3G capabilities since 2004 and 4G since 2015 which creates unfair competition at an enormous expense of Palestinian operators that cannot deliver 3G (e.g. in the Gaza Strip).⁶⁷

In the Gaza Strip, the above-mentioned restrictions are further exacerbated by the recurrent destruction of ICT infrastructure and Internet shutdowns as a result of Israeli military offences. For instance, in May 2021, the Internet and communications networks were the target of Israeli military attacks. As a result, the networks as well as equipment and devices were severely damaged or destroyed leading to the disruption of the Internet and communication services. The repairs are challenging – fiber-optic wires are considered dual-use goods and their importation is subject to tough Israeli measures.⁶⁸

In addition to this, the Gaza Strip suffers from frequent power cuts which leave it without electricity for an average of 20 hours per day.⁶⁹ This has a direct impact on the Internet services and although the population has resorted to using generators and rechargeable batteries, they can hardly withstand such long power cuts.

The average download and upload **speed of mobile and fixed Internet connections** in Palestine are shown in the figure below.

Figure 2: Mobile and fixed broadband speed in Palestine in 2021



Source: Palestine’s Mobile and Fixed Broadband Internet Speeds. 2021.

It is usually the download speed that is primarily advertised as for an average Internet user, most of her/ his activity depends on it (e.g. streaming video, web browsing). However, for a student or a person working from home the upload speed is equally important to allow them to send data from their devices. Typically, the upload speed for home Internet is often about 1/10th of the speed of the download speed.⁷⁰ Good Internet speed is considered by users’

⁶⁵ Tamleh. 2018. *Internet Freedoms in Palestine: Mapping of Digital Rights Violations and Threats*.
⁶⁶ The Palestinian Authority. 2021. *Palestinian Authority issues a stark warning of digital economy tardiness because of deprivation of 4G and 5G spectrum for Palestine*.
⁶⁷ The World Bank Group. 2016. *The Telecommunication Sector in the Palestinian Territories: A Missed Opportunity for Economic Development*.
⁶⁸ [n.a.]. *Many Gazans cut off from the world as Israel targets communications and internet networks*. 2021.
⁶⁹ Tamleh. 2018. *Internet Freedoms in Palestine: Mapping of Digital Rights Violations and Threats*.
⁷⁰ Forbes, A. 2020. *What are good download and upload speeds for home internet?*

individual needs and the number of users/ devices at a time. For reference, the broadband guide published by the Federal Communications Commission⁷¹ lists the following recommendations:

Table 2: The recommended download speed for individual activities

Activity	Recommended minimum download speed (in Mbps ⁷²)
general browsing and email	1
social media	1
file downloading	10
student	5 - 25
streaming high-definition video	5 - 8
video teleconferencing	6

Source: The Federal Communications Commission. 2020.

The recommended values do not seem much below the current average speed in Palestine although the number of users/ devices play an important role. While the speed of up to 25 Mbps might be sufficient for one user on one device with one high-demand application running at a time, it would not withhold three users or devices with more than one high-demand application (such as video streaming or video conferencing).⁷³ For instance, the videoconference platform Zoom suggests download and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps for videoconferencing with multiple participants in high definition with 3G or 4G spectrum.⁷⁴ Additionally, the recommended speed for working from home does not come below 25 Mbps.⁷⁵

Another important measurement when considering the quality of the Internet connection is **latency** because of its ability to have an impact on gameplay or buffer times. Latency is a quantifiable delay of data transfer between the local computer and a remote server. It is measured in milliseconds and although the best latency speed is zero, anything below 30ms/ 40ms is considered optimal.⁷⁶ The values in figure 2 above show that the average fixed broadband in Palestine meets these criteria.

A striking increase in the country’s digital statistical indicators can be observed in the number of active **social media users** – while in 2017 they represented 35% of the population, in 2020 it was 54%. This development outpaces the global digital statistics – 37% penetration in 2017⁷⁷ and 49% penetration in 2020.⁷⁸ The data demonstrate the high popularity and usage of the social media in Palestine which is a valuable basis for planning and designing the digital transformation in the country, particularly within the education system. The most popular social media is Facebook which has gained immense membership particularly since the Arab Spring uprisings. However, although it is widely used as a social and political platform in Palestine, it has not been given much attention in relation to the teaching and learning process.⁷⁹

⁷¹ The federal agency responsible for implementing and enforcing the communications law and regulations in the USA.

⁷² Mbps (megabits per second) is the standard measure of broadband speed. It refers to the speed with which information packets are downloaded from, or uploaded to, the Internet.

⁷³ The Federal Communications Commission. 2020. *Household Broadband Guide*.

⁷⁴ Zoom. 2021. *The system requirements for Windows, macOS, and Linux*.

⁷⁵ For instance, Armstrong, R. L. (2021), McNally, C. (2021) or Forbes, A. (2020).

⁷⁶ Forbes, A. 2020. *What are good download and upload speeds for home internet?*

⁷⁷ DataReportal. 2017. *Digital 2017: Palestine*.

⁷⁸ DataReportal. 2020. *Digital 2020: Palestine*.

⁷⁹ Shraim, K. 2014. *Pedagogical Innovation within Facebook: A Case Study in Tertiary Education in Palestine*.

An important angle to consider in relation to digital services is also the **affordability perspective**. The most comprehensive retail pricing benchmark for the MENA region is issued by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain. It commissions a yearly study on behalf of the Arab Regulators Network allowing Arab countries to compare the price levels within and between countries, and also to compare them with the OECD countries.⁸⁰ Based on the 2020 data for **mobile services**, Palestinian consumers face one of the most expensive mobile prices. A mobile basket⁸¹ of 30 calls/month with no data will cost more than \$32 which puts Palestine on the second most expensive position. The average monthly cost for the MENA region is \$16.⁸²

Regarding **mobile data**, the Palestinian market had been consistently above the MENA average until 2018. However, the 2020 data show a more favourable trend for consumers. For instance, a 2GB data basket for \$16/month is considerably cheaper than the MENA average of \$24/month. For comparison, in 2018 the same data basket cost \$72/month placing Palestine on the most expensive position out of 21 analysed countries (with the MENA average price being \$30/month in 2018). The only variance where mobile data remain significantly higher than the MENA average is for business mobile baskets with 5GB data/month and above.⁸³ For **fixed broadband**, Palestinian consumers experience lower prices than the MENA average. For as many as 12 various baskets analysed in the study, Palestine belongs to the seven cheapest MENA countries in this respect.⁸⁴

With the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in mind, investing in the digital infrastructure and economy seems vital to mitigate the negative impact of the accumulating crises. However, digital transformation requires a cultural change that needs to be facilitated and supported on the national level. Although the *National Policy Agenda 2017 – 2022* declares the intention to support and promote the digital economy in the country under the national priority 6 – Economic Independence, it does not elaborate on specific details nor action plans how to achieve this. The critical need to support the digital development was also noted by the World Bank Group in their *Assistance Strategy for the West Bank and Gaza for the Period of 2022 – 2025* as it will have ‘an outsized impact on building a well-connected Palestine’.⁸⁵ To this end, in March 2021, the World Bank approved a grant of \$20 million to increase access to high-speed broadband services in selected Palestinian areas and enable the development of selected e-government services.⁸⁶

Overall, by investing in digital transformation, Palestine will be better equipped to deal with the present and future crises as digital solutions have the potential to lead to efficiencies that can be invested to support the economic resilience of the country. However, an apt consideration has been voiced by Boulus-Rødje & Bjørn to go beyond the idealised portrayals of digital technologies increasing digital interconnectedness and root these efforts

⁸⁰ The World Bank Group. 2016. *The Telecommunication Sector in the Palestinian Territories: A Missed Opportunity for Economic Development*.

⁸¹ The study is based on the cost of purchasing ‘baskets’ of telecommunications services and the comparison is performed by using Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) which incorporate the financial differences between exchange rates as well as the differences in the state of the economies as seen through the purchasing power of citizens in each country. Therefore, monetary values are expressed in United States dollars with PPP and VAT included.

⁸² Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain. 2021. *Telecommunications Retail Price Benchmarking for Arab Countries 2020*.

⁸³ Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain. 2021. *Telecommunications Retail Price Benchmarking for Arab Countries 2020*.

⁸⁴ Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain. 2021. *Telecommunications Retail Price Benchmarking for Arab Countries 2020*.

⁸⁵ The World Bank Group. 2021. *Assistance Strategy for the West Bank and Gaza for the Period of 2022 – 2025*.

⁸⁶ The World Bank. 2021. *USD 20 Million to Boost Digital Development in the Palestinian Territories*.

in the complex realities and conditions on the ground, especially in unstable and challenging socio-political settings such as Palestine.⁸⁷

5.2 Digitalisation in education

The challenging realities of the technological infrastructure in Palestine have a direct impact on the digitalisation of education. Although there are technological tools in schools such as computers, interactive boards or LCD projectors and substantial efforts have been made in developing e-learning approach, the overall attitude towards it remains rather conservative. In 2015, a strategic decision was made concerning digitalisation of the education system and a national team consisting of Ministry of Education representatives and private sectors representatives was created. These efforts focused on teachers' training to improve their ICT skills and on providing digital content to supplement the Palestinian curriculum. The project confirmed that this could be an effective as well as attractive approach facilitating a shift towards a student-centred learning process but huge financial resources are required to support it.⁸⁸

The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022 declares the national intention to move towards digitalisation of education, namely through four components out of which three depend on the technological infrastructure (the Internet access, portals, computers) and are therefore not fully within the Palestinian control; the last component comprises the teacher training. The Ministry of Education views municipalities and the local government units as pivotal partners to apply the policy of digitalisation of education at a larger scale. One of the key efforts is the development of e-learning programmes for which the Ministry intends to mobilise appropriate funding.⁸⁹

Over the last decade, educational institutions in Palestine have increasingly adopted e-learning to supplement their face to face education. E-learning initiatives for **primary and secondary schools** have been mostly limited to small-scale projects with participation of selected schools, teachers and students only. Although teachers are generally able to use PowerPoint or video presentations in class, learner-centred education is not widely understood and practiced in Palestine. Regarding the **VET system** in an ALE perspective, the latest ETF Torino Process Assessment highlights the limited availability of information not only on upskilling but more widely on ALE in Palestine.⁹⁰ Online training does not seem to be taken up by young graduates to enhance their employability. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the move towards digitalising the learning experience and the Ministry of Education published a five-page guideline that included tips on how vocational teachers could use distance learning.⁹¹ Other efforts include the delivery of online short courses in solar energy and hybrid automotive technology by the Ministry of Labour in cooperation with the local chambers of commerce. International aid agencies such as GIZ, ACTED or Enabel support teacher training in digital learning and explore opportunities to integrate a blended model in the future. Similarly, the YMCA Vocational School in Jericho is using online methods to teach a course in sustainable agriculture.⁹²

As for Palestinian **universities**, almost all of them have adopted e-learning for some courses to some extent.⁹³ The need to incorporate e-learning into the Palestinian higher education system seems especially compelling given the movement restrictions, numerous checkpoints

⁸⁷ Boulus-Rødje, N. & Bjørn, P. 2019. *Digital (Occupied) Palestine*.

⁸⁸ Naser, F. 2018. *The Implementation of Digitalization System in Education in Palestine*.

⁸⁹ Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2017. *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022*.

⁹⁰ ETF. 2021. *Policies for Human Capital Development Palestine*.

⁹¹ ETF. 2020. *Mapping COVID 19*.

⁹² ETF. 2020. *Mapping COVID 19*.

⁹³ Shraim, K. J. & Khlaif, Z. N. 2010. *An E-Learning Approach to Secondary Education in Palestine: Opportunities and Challenges*.

and closures. In addition, while the demand for higher education in Palestine is increasing, the system struggles with a lack of capacities and its limited ability to absorb it. However, the implementation of e-learning programmes at the Palestinian universities faces various obstacles such as inadequate infrastructure or human capital. The group that is most likely to take advantage of e-learning is the adult employed students who can pursue their academic study without the need to give up their jobs.⁹⁴

The ambivalent views towards digital technologies can be also observed among institutions providing **adult learning and education**. As a study by Al-Kilani demonstrates, the key success factors in their opinion were related to the quality of programmes and the training provided while only seven out of 91 respondents considered technologies and associated skills as relevant in this regard.⁹⁵

As already mentioned, the intentions for the development of ALE in Palestine are captured in the *National Strategy for Adult Education 2014 – 2019*. Although the strategy acknowledges a lack of information technology in the educational process and untapped potential of distant learning, it does not outline specific steps to integrate digital approaches through orchestrated national efforts. The virtually non-existent data sources exploring the digitalisation status of ALE (excluding VET and higher education) in Palestine appear to confirm the experience of the interviewed ALE providers whereby the digitalisation in ALE has been brought about by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (see further details in chapter 6). One of the most comprehensive studies of ALE in Palestine carried out by Al-Kilani⁹⁶ in 2019 makes no reference to e-learning methods nor digitalisation as such which also suggests this approach is not widely used yet.

The lacking technological infrastructure and limited skills of teachers to deliver classes online were fully manifested during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially at its beginning. Based on an impact survey conducted by PCBS from March to May 2020, 49% of households stated that the unavailability of the Internet prevented their children from participating in the educational activities during the lockdown period while 22% of them did not participate as their teachers did not perform any educational activities. Additionally, 40% of households whose children participated in any type of educational activities have evaluated the experience as bad.⁹⁷

These data indicate increased inequalities between those with connection to the Internet and those without, with people living in remote areas being particularly disadvantaged. Although the Internet usage is one of the most frequently used indicators of the **digital divide**, it is not the only one and the possession of personal computers, mobile phones and other ICT devices is equally relevant. Furthermore, the Internet coverage is irrelevant if an individual does not know how to use an Internet browser. The digital divide is therefore not only in the accessibility and affordability but also in digital literacy. Recently, there has been a growing body of evidence that despite its many advantages and wide potential, the Internet usage can compound inequalities and contribute to an increasing digital divide.⁹⁸ Similarly, Shraim & Khlaif, based on their 2010 study results, expressed doubts that e-learning will create equal access to the learning opportunities for all. In their view, it is particularly in rural areas with limited Internet connection where this can cause problems and stark inequalities.⁹⁹ Therefore, the digitalisation of education in Palestine will require a holistic approach in which

⁹⁴ Kayed, R. N. [n.d.]. *Integrating e-learning into higher education*.

⁹⁵ Al-Kilani, S. 2019. *Adult Education in Palestine: The Situation, the Requirements and Prospects of Improvement*.

⁹⁶ Al-Kilani, S. 2019. *Adult Education in Palestine: The Situation, the Requirements and Prospects of Improvement*.

⁹⁷ PCBS. 2020. *The Socio-economic Conditions of Palestinian Households Survey*.

⁹⁸ Raz, D. 2020. *The Arab Worlds' Digital Divide*.

⁹⁹ Shraim, K. J. & Khlaif, Z. N. 2010. *An E-Learning Approach to Secondary Education in Palestine: Opportunities and Challenges*.

not only the technological infrastructure is critical but also acknowledging the local socio-economic context and its associated challenges.

6 Stakeholders' expectations

6.1 ALE providers' perspective

Based on the discussions with ALE providers, the commencement of digitalisation in ALE is largely perceived with the COVID-19 pandemic onset in 2020. Out of seven providers, only one had delivered online courses prior to that; the rest of them had to adapt their educational activities during the crisis. While the distant learning is not a novel concept, it is not a common one utilised in relation to ALE in Palestine. The availability of electricity, a stable Internet connection and adequate technological devices are prerequisite to successful online learning; however, given the political and economic realities of Palestine, they are not readily available and accessible.

The rapid and unplanned move to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic caused numerous challenges globally; however, **the lack of adequate infrastructure** enabling this change, the lack of experience as well as little preparation proved especially challenging for Palestinians. Understandably, the school education was prioritised and supported by the Ministry of Education through an educational portal with educational materials, interactive games and videos for teachers, students as well as parents. In Gaza, online courses were broadcast through media outlets, including a radio station. From the long-term perspective, the establishment of the Taskforce for Distance Learning appears especially promising (led by the Ministry of Education and UNESCO)¹⁰⁰ as its mobilised partnerships, funds as well as coordinated interventions might bring positive outcomes for digital learning as a whole by creating a basis for distance learning solutions.

During the pandemic, the interviewed ALE providers did not have the level of support as the formal education system although they regarded the training provided by DVV International as essential. Indeed, the cited impact of this intervention reflects the findings of a recent study by Shraim & Crompton who claim that early adopters have a significant role in influencing others to adopt the transformation to online learning.¹⁰¹ While the interviewed providers described this process as challenging, their will and motivation to continue delivering their educational activities, albeit in modified means, were distinct. Its positive impact on their trainees was substantiated in the beneficiaries' focus group discussion.

In addition to the problems related to the inadequate technological infrastructure, **the lack of technical skills** both from the perspective of trainers as well as trainees caused considerable difficulties at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtually no preparation time and limited ICT skills and experience suggest that the term *emergency remote teaching* is more appropriate to describe this process. Bozkurt & Sharma introduce this terminology pointing out the clear distinction between *online distance education* and *emergency remote teaching* – while the former is complex and requires planning and designing, the latter simply involves uploading educational context.¹⁰² This definition appears apt for the initial experience of the interviewed providers to deliver their activities online. They described how they all¹⁰³ needed training on how to use online platforms such as MS Teams or Zoom and how to engage their trainees in the virtual environment where the interaction and feedback through non-verbal communication are not easily detected. To counteract this limitation, they turned to social media (e.g. WhatsApp) to provide support to their students through videos, manuals or simple instructions and by being easily accessible and reachable. Again, this was

¹⁰⁰ UNESCO. 2020. *COVID-19 in Palestine: how distance learning will help student continue education*.

¹⁰¹ Shraim, K. & Crompton, H. 2020. *The Use of Technology to Continue Learning in Palestine Disrupted with COVID-19*.

¹⁰² Bozkurt, A. & Sharma, R. C. 2020. *Emergency remote teaching in a time of global crisis due to CoronaVirus pandemic*.

¹⁰³ 'All' refers to directors, coordinators as well as trainers in the community centres/ private providers.

corroborated as helpful and supportive by the trainees in the beneficiaries' focus group discussion.

This result reflects those of Bozkurt & Sharma who underline the importance of trainers' social presence through social communication tools to maintain the lost spontaneous interaction.¹⁰⁴ Although the above-mentioned study refers to the school environment and the relationship between teachers and students, it can be equally applied in the ALE setting. While the trainers primarily focused on the technical aspect of delivering the educational content online (with the trainees being able to 'receive' it successfully), the trainees' appreciation went beyond the mere technicalities and the feelings of motivation and 'connection' were often commented on. This strongly resonates with the view expressed by Bozkurt & Sharma who imply that in a time of crisis, it is perhaps not exclusively the educational content the trainers/ teachers should focus on but rather the ways how to share, collaborate and support each other. The rationale behind this premise is simple – when the circumstances are back to normal, people will remember how they felt and how they were supported when they were under stress and pressure.¹⁰⁵

The discussions with the interviewed providers confirmed that while the technological challenge was enormous it was also accompanied by a distinctive **cultural shift**. With the online learning imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the providers could sense a certain barrier, especially from elder people, to embracing digital education. According to them, digital tools and devices are generally perceived in connection to entertainment and social media – and they do not emanate the same level of seriousness as the traditional teaching and learning process. A similar attitude was observed by the private provider of ALE, the RITAJ Managerial Solutions whose focus might slightly differ from that of community centres as their activities are not provided for free (or for significantly reduced prices). By offering certified training programmes in business development, management, language training, accounting or personal development, its target groups are not the most vulnerable persons in emergency situation. Nevertheless, the initial resistance to digital learning was present as the clients were not comfortable communicating online with several refusing to use their web camera. This confirms the assumption that the willingness or resistance to embracing digital education are not based on the individual target group and their vulnerability/ marginalisation but rather on their prior experience (or a lack of it). The hesitant attitude that the interviewed providers experienced confirms research findings as the general perception that online learning is not an effective learning approach had been expressed well before the COVID-19 pandemic – e.g. by Shraim in 2012.¹⁰⁶ Although using ICT in Palestine has been repeatedly recommended by the international community (e.g. the World Bank or UNDP), online learning has not been widely accepted by policymakers.¹⁰⁷

On the whole, thanks to their experience and challenges they had overcome, the interviewed providers appear very clear on potential advantages and disadvantages of online learning. The table below summarises their views.

¹⁰⁴ Bozkurt, A. & Sharma, R. C. 2020. *Emergency remote teaching in a time of global crisis due to CoronaVirus pandemic*.

¹⁰⁵ Bozkurt, A. & Sharma, R. C. 2020. *Emergency remote teaching in a time of global crisis due to CoronaVirus pandemic*.

¹⁰⁶ Shraim, K. 2012. *Moving Towards e-Learning Paradigm: Readiness of Higher Education Institutions in Palestine*.

¹⁰⁷ Shraim, K. 2012. *Moving Towards e-Learning Paradigm: Readiness of Higher Education Institutions in Palestine*.

Table 3: Perceived advantages and disadvantages of online learning

Advantages of online learning (as perceived by the interviewed providers)	
reduced cost for providers of adult education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ re-purposing of recorded learning materials ○ no classroom-type premises required
reduced cost for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ no travel expenses ○ no childcare expenses
flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ lessons can be taken anytime during the day/ week ○ recorded lessons can be accessed anytime
skills development ¹⁰⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ digital skills ○ pedagogical skills for effective digital education
global trend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ digitalisation permeates all aspects of life, not limited to education
Disadvantages of online learning (as perceived by the interviewed providers)	
infrastructural and technological demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a stable Internet connection required ○ a sufficient number and quality of ICT devices required
skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ digital skills ○ pedagogical skills for effective digital education
lack of community and immediate social interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ no immediate feedback, e.g. through body language ○ staying at home can cause further isolation of already vulnerable groups
content limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ not suitable for vocational training, practical courses
distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ difficult to focus when in home environment

Source: Focus group discussion with ALE providers

The COVID-19 pandemic and the related shift to digital education has had an interesting effect whereby it forced trainers to consider not only *what* should be taught but more importantly *how* it should be taught. Although the initial attention centred on the technicalities of delivering the content online, it has prompted the discussion about the attributes of an effective teacher/ trainer. The recent experience of the interviewed providers proves the basic argument according to which the process, i.e. the variety of pedagogical methods and strategies used is critical. It requires not only the content knowledge, but also pedagogical skills and creativity which is the reason why some trainers view this as an opportunity while others as a threat (see the table above).

While the general consensus among the interviewed providers is that the digital education brings new opportunities which should be seized and sustained irrespective of the COVID-19 pandemic, they regard it with caution when considering the **marginalised and vulnerable groups**. The increased access the digital education provides to persons with mobility/ sight/ hearing impairment is indisputable. On the other hand, some of the providers work with people to whom ALE is only ‘a vehicle’ to the long-term support they need. For instance, the Al Saraya Centre for Community Service focuses its activities on women, children and youth in the Jerusalemite community. Given the harsh realities of life in Jerusalem and its current political, economic as well as social hardship, the ALE courses are centred on the development of life skills and the ability of an individual to face life’s obstacles. The community centre offers a variety of practical training (setting up a business, establishing business partnerships, vocational courses such as hairdressing, photography, etc.), mentoring and psychological support are at the forefront of their activities. Although they did not pause with these activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, their lessons learnt are clear – for their target groups, face to face contact is vital. While they were successful delivering practical courses online and plan to continue this form to some degree in the future, personal contact with their target groups needs to be preserved. The character of the support required (e.g. domestic violence, sexual abuse) as well as the need to socialise outweigh the economic and pragmatic advantages of digital learning.

¹⁰⁸ Depends on individual trainers – some perceive it as an advantage and an opportunity, others as unnecessary demands.

The overall sense that online learning is likely to eventually become an integral part of education irrespective of the future development of the COVID-19 pandemic was shared by all interviewed providers. Appreciating its opportunities and acknowledging its challenges, the ideal solution from their perspective appears obvious – by combining the strengths of both forms to create **blended learning**. This would allow them to take advantage of the flexibility and reduced costs of digital education while maintaining the social interaction and personal contact that are necessary for certain types of educational content and/ or target groups. The respondents understand that although the educational transformation in Palestine might have been instigated, it is a complex process including essential steps such as reliable infrastructure, accessible training and systemic support.

6.2 ALE beneficiaries' perspective

The perceptions of digital learning expressed by beneficiaries to a large extent correspond with those stated by ALE providers. During the focus group discussion, the first aspect commented on was the **inadequate infrastructure** that directly affects all facets of their life such as electricity shortage, weak Internet connection or a lack of technological devices. The underdeveloped infrastructure is also one of the reasons of virtually no experience with digital learning prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, most of the interviewed learners struggled with remote learning due to their **lack of technical skills** – e.g. they were not familiar with platforms such as Zoom or did not know how to share documents online. They could also see similar struggles on the trainers' side and recognised this was a learning process for all of them. As already mentioned above, the interviewed trainees highly appreciated the support provided by the trainers through the social media. The engagement of the social media in the learning process resonates with conclusions of several studies¹⁰⁹ which suggest increased learners' satisfaction with course delivery in such cases (through enhanced interaction and flexibility in course content delivery). The reasons cited for the particular use of Facebook, for example, are the familiarity and everyday experience. The social network sites also seem to have the potential to promote greater learner autonomy which has been confirmed by the respondents (as described in more detail below) and therefore, facilitate a shift towards a learner-centred approach.¹¹⁰

While facing initial difficulties, all respondents view this as a positive opportunity and their willingness to learn and 'broaden their horizons' seems unfaltering. One of the reasons for their optimistic attitude is the **notable impact** this experience has already had on their life. The newly acquired skills exceed the topic knowledge of their courses and represent life skills that are easily transferrable and applicable in any context. For instance, more effective **time management** was mentioned by several interviewees. While time flexibility is generally considered one of the biggest advantages of online learning, it is a fragile one as it requires a certain level of self-management and commitment.

Another positive outcome cited by the interviewed beneficiaries was their **ability to mentor and support people in their community** thanks to the technical skills they had acquired. This is a particularly positive effect which brings advantages to all involved – people in the community have direct local support while the beneficiaries' self-esteem and motivation increase. For two respondents, digital learning also had an economic effect through an increased income by having developed the skills to work and offer their services remotely.

Overall, the advantages of digital learning as perceived by the interviewed beneficiaries are identical to those expressed by the providers. In addition to reduced costs and increased flexibility they recognise and appreciate that this form of education promotes their self-learning which increases their confidence and motivation. Thanks to online opportunities,

¹⁰⁹ For example, Irwin, C., Ball, L. Desbrow, B. & Leveritt, M. (2012) or Shraim, K. (2012).

¹¹⁰ Shraim, K. 2014. *Pedagogical Innovation within Facebook: A Case Study in Tertiary Education in Palestine*.

they feel connected not only to the immediate community of trainers/ other learners but to the wider world. The above-mentioned benefits of economic gains through increased income are obvious. In terms of perceived disadvantages, they agree unanimously with the ones cited by the interviewed providers. They particularly lack the social interaction and spontaneous face to face communication.

6.3 Policy-makers' perspective

The key strategic document concerning ALE in Palestine is the *National Strategy for Adult Education 2014 – 2019* which is currently being reviewed and revised. Although this is an ongoing process, the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic have been too extensive not to be manifested in such a fundamental policy material. Based on the interview with representatives of the Ministry of Education, the biggest challenges of ALE in Palestine stem from its limited funding and the diverse perceptions of its importance. Despite the great developments achieved over the recent years, there is still limited coordination among ministries which creates particular difficulties as ALE is strategically overseen by three bodies – the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Development (see chapter 4 for further details). However, the engagement of all these sectorial partners in the National Team for the National Strategy for Adult Education indicates there is commitment to improve this aspect of management and leadership.

The interview also confirmed that the Ministry of Education is well aware of the urgent need to revise the strategy in light of the recent developments and include the use of information technology in ALE. In relation to that, more emphasis on qualified human resources is necessary to ensure quality and effective delivery and positive outcomes for final beneficiaries. They also recognise the need to promote and support distant learning and the development of digital skills.

While the lack of political will to support the transformation to e-learning has often been pointed out in the past,¹¹¹ the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the strategic need for strong digital infrastructure. Furthermore, it has exposed the value and potential of digital learning in education irrespective of the pandemic in the future. It will be of utmost importance to sustain the commitment on the national level and transform it into specific strategies with defined action plans and dedicated funding.

During the interview with the Chairman of the Palestinian Trainers' Association, another strategic development opportunity has transpired - the current lack of standards of ALE trainers has a direct impact on the limited quality control of their practice and qualifications. This was the focus of the 4th Palestinian Trainers' Forum which was held virtually in August 2021. The seminars, workshops and discussions considered the development of a **competency framework** for trainers to pave the way to the higher quality of training and, ultimately, to ensure impact on the final beneficiaries. The Chairman of the Association views an **accreditation framework** as critical to achieve this and emphasises the need for a strategic approach. For instance, the understanding of ALE should expand beyond the mere illiteracy, digital infrastructure needs to be strengthened while the development of adult education centres needs to be supported – on the national level. It is important to pay attention to the trainers' training and develop a clear system of criteria and standards reflected in the competency framework and accreditation. At the same time, the vision of ALE should include the concept of technology-enhanced learning that is appropriate for the Palestinian context. While the digital learning experience of the COVID-19 pandemic is invaluable, the development of a strategic plan to integrate technology into education in the long term is essential to transition from the *emergency remote teaching* to the *online education* with its maximum potential.

¹¹¹ For example, Shraim, K. (2012) or Shraim, K. & Crompton, H. (2020).

7 Recommendations

Based on the desk and field research, the following recommendations for DVV International have been developed.

On the macro level:

Continue working closely with the Ministry of Education to strengthen the strategic and systemic support of ALE, more specifically:

- support the development of **a clear vision and concept of ALE** on the national level acknowledging its relevance and potential impact on the wider socio-economic change in the country. Encourage the national discussion on ALE as it is fundamental not only for individual growth but also for community development and economic progress, in particular in challenging circumstances such as Palestine.
- Support the review and revision of the *National Strategy for Adult Education* with **explicit integration of the digital aspect**. It is essential to sustain the national commitment to utilise the advantages of e-learning more widely irrespective of the COVID-19 pandemic and for decision-makers to provide the needed impetus to stimulate technological developments in this area.
- Continue working with the Palestinian Trainers' Association to **support the development of the competency framework** for ALE trainers providing a clear system of criteria and standards to increase the quality of ALE and ensure a positive impact on the final beneficiaries.
- Support **active involvement of academia and university representatives** to explore potential systemic improvements in trainers' training, including their **digital literacy**, for instance through the National Institute for Educational Training or individual universities so that the content of trainer education meets the online learning environment requirements.

On the meso level:

Continue collaborating with community-based centres to contribute to the local development, namely in the following areas:

- consider providing **on-going training for ALE trainers to enhance their digital literacy**. Based on individual experience and needs, differentiated training programmes for basic, intermediate and advanced digital skills might be suitable to ensure targeted support and higher effectiveness.
- **Establish/ strengthen collaboration mechanisms for community centres and organisations providing ALE** to create a platform for sharing experience, engaging in professional discussions and providing peer support. Although the individual institutions might have different geographical coverage, agendas, methods or resources, they share the same philosophical framework and essential concept of striving towards empowerment and societal change.
- Build on the community aspect of ALE to **support the concept of learning communities**. In the context of conflict, the notions of one's identity, human rights and social responsibility within one's immediate community are acutely questioned and for that, specific skills and behavioural changes are required. In addition to practical training programmes, promote an emphasis on self-development, active citizenship and engagement in public life.

- Further to the point above, in all ALE-related activities, **reflect the characteristics of local communities**. As their circumstances and imminent problems differ across individual regions of Palestine so do their ambitions and real needs. For learning to be influential and even transforming, it should stem from a deep understanding and acknowledgment of these factors. For example, community-based need assessments might offer helpful insights and viewpoints to build upon.

On the micro level:

Through work with community-based centres and ALE providers, continue reaching out to individual learners, for instance by:

- **raising awareness about advantages and potential of digital learning** irrespective of a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting its value as a global trend with a wide socio-economic impact might help fight the prevalence of stereotypes that the Palestinian educational system (including ALE) is a traditional system depending on face to face delivery. As capitalising on technology that people use and know already increases the chances of success, consider **utilising social media tools** (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook) in this effort.
- **Publish and showcase success stories** of how (digital) ALE programmes contributed to the achievement of positive outcomes not only on an individual but also on a community level. Positive **motivation and encouragement** might also counteract the cultural barrier to e-learning, especially by depicting specific and tangible results such as a new job opportunity for an individual or a successful local initiative leading to concrete improvements in a community.

8 Annexes

8.1 Annex 1: Interview and focus group discussions' details

Date	Session	Institution	Number of representatives
31 July 2021	Focus group discussion with ALE providers	Arraba Community Centre for Youth and Adult Education (West Bank)	1
		Yamoun Community Centre for Youth and Adult Education (West Bank)	1
		Atfaluna Community Centre for Youth and Adult Education (Gaza)	1
		UCAS Centre for Continuing Education (Gaza)	1
		Khuzaa Community Centre for Youth and Adult Education (Gaza)	1
1 August 2021	Focus group discussion with ALE beneficiaries	Arraba Community Centre for Youth and Adult Education (West Bank)	2
		Yamoun Community Centre for Youth and Adult Education (West Bank)	1
		Atfaluna Community Centre for Youth and Adult Education (Gaza)	1
		UCAS Centre for Continuing Education (Gaza)	2
		Khuzaa Community Centre for Youth and Adult Education (Gaza)	2
4 August 2021	Interview	Palestinian Trainers' Association	1
5 August 2021	Interview	Al Saraya Centre for Community Service in Jerusalem (NGO)	1
5 August 2021	Interview	Ministry of Education	2
8 August 2021	Interview	Ritaj Managerial Solutions	1

8.2 Annex 2: Interview structure as defined in the Inception report

Aspects	Macro	Meso	Micro	Respondents/ stakeholders
Digitalisation situation and trends, needs and demands in the selected countries and regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current situation, • Digital strategy • Information infrastructure • Legislative and regulatory limitations • Progress with implementation of selected SDGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situation and trends (including digital divide) • Needs and demands • Technical limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level and means of digitalisation of population including marginalised groups • Aspects of digital divide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key policy actor responsible for education, digitalisation and socioeconomic development • NGO/ NGOs dealing with demands and rights of marginalised groups (including digital, if any), data privacy, governance etc. • DVV local offices as source of verification of the collected data • Providers of digital education (various educational types and levels)
Recent experience of digitalisation efforts in education (HE, SE, TVET, ALE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic, challenges, and developments in the last two years • Quantitative and qualitative data • Existing socioeconomic and educational policies and their focus on digitalisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic, challenges, and trends in the last two years • Quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. access to Wi-Fi, Internet connectivity and coverage, e-learning tools, online communication platforms) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users' perception of developments and trends in the last two years • Priority needs in education and availability of digitalised education means • Qualitative experience (e.g. access to Wi-Fi, Internet connectivity and coverage, e-learning tools, online communication platforms) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key policy actor responsible for digitalisation and/ or education • EUD, USAID, UN agencies and other donors about any projects/ programs related to digitalisation and education • Providers of digital education (various educational types and levels) • Local beneficiaries represented by various marginalised groups (also NGOs representing their voice)

Aspects	Macro	Meso	Micro	Respondents/ stakeholders
Stratification and a descriptive analysis of different social and demographic groups in relation to digital tools and learning formats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General level of digitalisation, plans and regulations in this field, stakeholders motivated in improving digitalisation and/or adult education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of digitalisation • Accessibility of digitalised education • Specific needs in ALE, motivation and possible usage of digitalised ALE • Specific ALE and digital offers for each of the groups • Digital skills and competences of target groups (teachers/ lecturers, beneficiaries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific beneficiaries' needs in ALE, motivation and possible usage of digitalised ALE • Specific ALE and digital offers for each of the groups • Digital skills and competences of target groups (teachers/ lecturers, beneficiaries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key policy actor responsible for digitalisation and/ or education • Providers of digital education (various educational types and levels) • Local beneficiaries represented by various marginalised groups
Analysis of potential and perspective tools of ALE digitalisation in respective countries/ regions with a focus on marginalised groups as final beneficiaries, taking into account further digital divide and objective limitations of the context		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good practices in using digital tools for reaching out to marginalised groups in ALE • Potential impact of digitalisation on community learning and inclusion of marginalised groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived benefits of digitalisation in target groups' view • Perceived challenges and risks of digitalisation in target groups' view • Potential impact of digitalisation on community learning and inclusion of marginalised groups • Personal success stories of beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers of digital education (various educational types and levels) • Local beneficiaries represented by various marginalised groups

Aspects	Macro	Meso	Micro	Respondents/ stakeholders
<p>Steps that should be taken to promote and effectively use digital ALE to correspond to the needs of key target/ marginalised groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations, ideas and reflections • Existing or developing plans, complementary to digitalised ALE • Potential approaches to mitigate the risks regarding the use of digital tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations, ideas and reflections • The most acute challenges of education/ ALE in the country • Potential approaches to mitigate the risks regarding the use of digital tools • Recommendations for ALE providers and networks, national governments and DVV International 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations for all involved parties regarding digitalisation and their ability and capacity to address beneficiaries' needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International stakeholders and motivated policy-makers and experts • Providers of digital education (various educational types and levels) • Local beneficiaries represented by various marginalised groups

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